NEWS RELEASE



OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

San Diego, California

United States Attorney Robert S. Brewer, Jr.

For Further Information, Contact:

Assistant U. S. Attorney Cindy Cipriani (619) 546-9608

For Immediate Release

Justice Department Files Sexual Harassment Lawsuit against Owner and Manager of Rental Properties in Spring Valley

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY – June 11, 2019

SAN DIEGO – The Department of Justice today announced that it has filed a lawsuit alleging that Larry Nelson, owner and manager of residential housing in Spring Valley, violated the Fair Housing Act by subjecting female tenants of his properties to sexual harassment and retaliation.

The lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California, alleges that Nelson engaged in sexual harassment and retaliation of female tenants from at least 2005 to the present, by, among other things, engaging in unwelcome sexual touching, offering to reduce monthly rental payments in exchange for sex, making unwelcome sexual comments and advances, making intrusive and unannounced visits to female tenants' homes to further his sexual advances, and evicting or threatening to evict female tenants who objected or refused his sexual advances.

"The Fair Housing Act prohibits sexual harassment and retaliation in housing," said Assistant Attorney

General Eric Dreiband. "Any landlord who sexually harasses his tenants or retaliates against them for refusing sexual advances, destroys their housing security and risks families' ability to keep a roof over their heads. Anyone who engages in this kind of disgusting and illegal conduct should be on notice: the Department of Justice will be coming for you."

"Let this be a wake-up call for abusive landlords," said U.S. Attorney Robert Brewer. "Holding a key to someone's property is not a license to exploit them for sex. The Department of Justice is going to make sure a tenant's home is a place of safety, not suffering."

In October 2017, the Department of Justice <u>launched an initiative</u> to combat sexual harassment in housing. In April 2018, the Department announced the <u>nationwide rollout</u> of the initiative, including three major components: A new joint Task Force with HUD to combat sexual harassment in housing, an outreach toolkit to leverage the Department's nationwide network of U.S. Attorney's Offices, and a public awareness campaign, including the release of a national Public Service Announcement. Since launching the initiative, the Department of Justice has filed 10 lawsuits alleging a pattern or practice of sexual harassment in housing.

Today's lawsuit seeks monetary damages to compensate the victims, a civil penalty to vindicate the public interest, and a court order barring future discrimination and harassment. The complaint contains allegations of unlawful conduct; the allegations must be proven in federal court.

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability and familial status. More information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces is available at http://www.justice.gov/crt. Individuals who believe that they may have been victims of sexual harassment or other types of housing discrimination at rental dwellings owned or managed by Larry Nelson, or who have other information that may be relevant to this case, can contact the Housing Discrimination Tip Line, at 1-800-896-7743, and select mailbox 9991 to leave a message.

Individuals can also report sexual harassment and other forms of housing discrimination by e-mailing the Justice Department at fairhousing@usdoj.gov.

###